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A N
A N S W E R

To all the
EXCUSES *and* PRETENCES
Which Men ordinarily make for
their not coming to the
HOLY COMMUNION.

To which is added,
A Brief Account of the End and
Design of the Holy Communion;
the Obligation to receive it; the
Way to prepare for it; and the
Behaviour of our selves both at,
and after it.

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very proper to be given away, by such
as are charitably inclined.

By a Divine of the Church of England.

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An *ANSWER* to all the *EXCUSES*
and *PRETENCES* which Men ordina-
rily make for their not coming to the
HOLY COMMUNION.

A *Certain Man made a great Supper, and
bad many; and sent his Servant at
Supper-time, to say to them that were
bidden, Come, for all things are now
ready. And they all with one Consent
gan TO MAKE EXCUSE: Luk. xvi, &c.*
The Design of this Parable is to represent the
manner of God's dealing with the People of the
Jews, upon their rejecting the Faith of Christ,
and refusing to embrace the Gospel. The Apo-
stles of Christ, who were the Servants of God,
were sent and commanded, in the first place, to
reach the glad Tidings of the Gospel to them;
and to invite them to come and partake of that
Blessing and Happiness, which was offered them
by God, through Faith in, and Obedience unto
his Son *Christ Jesus*. But they, generally ha-
ving their Hearts wholly in a manner addicted to
the Love of this World, had no Inclination to
receive so pure and spiritual an Institution: and
did not only themselves reject, but also persecu-
ted others for embracing the Christian Professi-
on; despising and treading under Foot the Son of
God, and counting the Blood of the Covenant,
wherewith they should have been sanctified, an
unholy thing; and even doing despight unto the
Spirit of Grace, which would have wrought upon

their Hearts, in order to their Conversion. And therefore the Man in this Parable, who made the Supper, was offended with those who did not come when they were invited, and therefore wholly excluded them from his Table, and sent his Servant to call others in their room, (as you may find it in the latter part of it :) So did Almighty God cast off the People of the Jews, upon their obstinate rejecting of *Jesus Christ*; giving them up to be destroy'd and scatter'd by the Power of the *Romans*; and commanded the Apostles to go out into all Parts of the World, to gather a Church, and a peculiar People unto him from among the Gentiles. But my present Aim, in reflecting upon this Parable, lies clear another way; namely, to represent, and reprove, those *Excuses* and *Pretences*, which so many Men do make, for their gross Neglect of the *Holy Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ*, notwithstanding that God, by the Mouth of his Ministers, does so frequently call, and earnestly invite them thereunto. And indeed this Matter is in so lively a manner, represented in the whole Design of it, that I think it is scarce possible to draw a more exact Parallel.

For here, in the first Place, we have Almighty God making a Supper for us, for the feeding and nourishing of our Souls, in Virtue and Piety, thro' the Passion and Death of our Saviour *Christ Jesus*, which he has appointed for ever to be commemorated, by our eating of this Bread and drinking of this Cup in remembrance of him. To this Supper we are, not once only, but often bidden; by the frequent Admonitions and Exhortations of God's Ministers addressed unto us, that we should come and be Partakers of this Holy Communion: And as the Guests who were in-
vited

ed in this Parable had framed some weak and
 pertinent Excuses for their not coming; One
 had bought a Piece of Ground, another five Yoke
 Oxen, and a third had married a Wife; none
 of which Things needed to have hindred them
 from accepting of the good Man's Kindness.
 Just so we, when from Month to Month, and
 from Year to Year, we continually turn our
 backs upon God's Holy Table; have yet some
 sort of Pretences wherewith we endeavour to sa-
 tisfy our Consciences, and to excuse this gross
 and scandalous Neglect of which we are guilty.
 That our Saviour *Christ Jesus* died for our Sins;
 that it is only for the sake of his Merits and Suffer-
 ings, that we can hope for Pardon and eternal
 life at the Hand of God; that before his Death,
 he left this Command with all that should be
 call'd by his Name; that they should *eat of this*
Bread, and drink of this Cup in remembrance
 of him; whereby we are oblig'd to shew forth
 his Death until his second coming: and lastly, that
 this Ordinance is the *Communion* of the *Body and*
Blood of Christ; or in other Terms, the Means
 whereby we do communicate in the Benefits of
 that Sacrifice which *Christ* offered, and in the Me-
 rits of that Death and Passion which he underwent
 for his *Body*, and by the shedding of his *Blood* for
 us, and consequently, that the receiving hereof,
 duly perform'd, is not only our Duty, but al-
 so a great Advantage and Benefit unto us: All
 these Things, I say, are so universally owned by
 all who profess Christianity, that I need not of-
 fer any thing for the proof of them, or any part of
 them. But then surely, one would think, that
 when Men, who are thus persuaded, do so often,
 and for so long a time absent themselves from this
 Ordinance, there must be some insuperable Dif-

ficulties and Obstacles in their way, which is beyond their Strength or Power to remove; or else, that they would never, at the same time both neglect their Duty, and forego their Interest. And yet I doubt not but to make it appear as plainly as any thing can be, that there is no thing which we can, at any time, pretend as a Hindrance of our coming to the Holy Communion, but what either is really, or ought to be no Hindrance at all; or else is such as it is in our Power, by that Grace and Assistance which God never denies to those who seek it, wholly to remove and put out of the way.

To come to the Matter then, and that I may proceed in an orderly Method, I shall reduce all the Impediments which Men do ever alledge for their not coming unto the Holy Communion, to these Five Heads; that is to say, either, *First*, That they are Sinners, and therefore dare not come; or *Secondly*, That they are so continually engaged, and taken up with Business, that they have not Time to prepare themselves for it; or *Thirdly*, That when they do endeavour to prepare themselves, they find that they cannot do it as it ought to be done; or *Fourthly*, That having formerly received the Communion, they find themselves never the better for it, and therefore think it to no purpose to come again; or *Lastly*, That they are not well satisfied with the manner of Celebrating, Administring, and Receiving this Ordinance in our Church, and therefore cannot join with our Congregations in it: Nor is there, I think, any thing that can be urged by way of Excuse for not coming to the Holy Communion, but what I shall fairly examine, and I hope, effectually confute, under some one or other of these Particulars.

First then, Some Men may say, That they are great Sinners, and therefore, upon that account dare not come to the Holy Communion, for fear lest they should be unworthy Receivers, and so, instead of obtaining any Benefit thereby, should only *Eat and drink their own Damnation*.

To this I answer, That if a Man lies under the Guilt of any Sin, and does not repent of it, and heartily resolve to forsake and amend it; it is indeed a Presumption and a Sin for such a person, whilst he continues in that State, to come to the Communion. But then I must tell him also, that not only his coming to the Holy Communion, but even his very *Prayers* are an *Abomination* to God, *Prov. xxviii. 9*. For what is it else, but a perfect Affront, and even a mocking of the divine Majesty, for a Man to make a shew of Worship and Honour to him, whilst at the same time he goes on in wilful Disobedience to his known Commands? which I wish were well and seriously considered by those Men, who make no scruple of addressing themselves to God in Prayer, whilst by reason of their Sins, of which they have not repented, they dare not approach unto this Holy Table.

But whatever Sins a Man has been guilty of in times past, if he truly repents of them, and heartily forsakes them for the time to come, God has so often, and so plainly promis'd in his Case, to grant a full and free Pardon of them, that they cannot justly be pretended as any Obstacle, which should hinder us from approaching to him in any of his Ordinances.

Since then it is in the Power of every Man (at least of every one who by a long Course of Wickedness has not provoked God wholly to withdraw his Grace from him) by that Grace

and Assistance, which God continually offers unto us, to repent of his Sins, and amend his Life: If such a Man looks upon his Sins as a Bar between him and the Holy Communion, yet it is plainly such a Bar, as is in his Power to remove, and therefore can never justly be pleaded as an Excuse in his behalf.

But some Man perhaps may say, that though he should beg God's Pardon for his Sins past, and sincerely resolve to forsake them; yet he fears that being frail, he may some time or other be prevailed on by his own Weakness, or the Strength of a Temptation, to break those Resolutions which he made, and return again to his Sins; and if this should ever be the Case with him, he doubts whether God would ever again admit him to Pardon and Reconciliation, and therefore he thinks it safer to abstain from the Holy Communion, rather than to run the Hazard of being for ever excluded from the Hope of Heaven.

In answer to this, I shall offer these Three Things.

First, Altho' a Man does plainly foresee, that hereafter he shall be most likely sometimes to fall into some Sins of Frailty and Infirmary, (such as a hasty Word, or a sudden and unadvised Action) yet this ought not to hinder him from coming to the Holy Communion: For as St. James tells us, that, *In many things we offend all*, Jam. iii. 2. So is there not any Man upon the Face of the Earth, who can be absolutely sure that he shall always hereafter keep himself free from all manner of Sin whatsoever. On the contrary, as there is no Man but what has his share, more or less, of human Infirmities, so is it most reasonable to conclude, that, in the

the Course of his Life, these will sometimes unavoidably surprize and betray him into some Sins. Against these our Infirmities, therefore, we must continually strive, and we may reasonably hope, that by God's Grace, and our own diligent and careful Endeavours, we may every Day more and more prevail against them: But if this were a good Reason for abstaining from the Holy Communion, because a Man cannot once get a full and perfect Victory over them; I cannot see how, even the best of Men (who cannot pretend to absolute Perfection) could safely venture to partake of it: And consequently, this wou'd be the way wholly to lay aside and abolish the very Ordinance itself.

Secondly, But as for wilful and deliberate Sins, returning again unto an habitual Course of Wickedness, there is no Man, but by the Grace of God, and his own Endeavours, may, if he pleases, for ever secure himself against it. For however God may think it fit, for our greater Humility, and a farther Tryal of us, to leave us still exposed to some of the common Infirmities of our Nature, yet in respect of all habitual or deliberate Sins, we may assure our selves, *that he is faithful, and will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that we may (if it be not our own Fault) be able to bear* 1 Cor. x. 13. Nor will he fail to draw nigh unto us, whilst we continue careful to draw nigh unto him, Jam. iv. 8. Let us then but stedfastly resolve, that we will be hearty and industrious in doing what lies in our own Power, and we need not be discouraged by any such Fears as these, as long as we are secure that God will never let us want his Assistance.

But

But *Thirdly*, Let us put the Case as bad as may be ; that after a serious Repentance, and most stedfast Resolutions of Amendment, ratified and confirmed by the Reception of the Holy Communion, a Man should be so far prevailed upon by the Temptations of the World, the Flesh, and the Devil, as to return again to his former Wickedness, in as high or a higher Degree than before ; yet, even in this Case, we cannot conclude that such a Person is for ever excluded by God from all Possibility of Pardon and Reconciliation : There are indeed some Passages of Scripture, that do represent the Condition of such an one to be very dreadful and dangerous ; as *Heb. vi. 4, 5, 6.* and *chap. x. 26, 27.* *2 Pet. ii. 20, 21.* But if, on the other side, we consider how often, and how highly the Mercy of God is set forth and magnified, even towards the greatest Sinners, upon their true Repentance, that *he has no Pleasure in the death of the Wicked, but that the Wicked turn from his way and live.* *Ezek. xxxiii. 11.* That *he is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that they should come to Repentance,* *2 Pet. iii. 9.* That *our Sins be as Scarlet, or as red as Crimson,* yet God is ready, upon our Repentance, to make them *as white as Wooll, or Snow,* *Isai. i. 18.* From these, and many such Passages of Scripture, I think we may well gather, that if the most profligate and relapsed Sinner, does ever after a long time, come at last to such a Sense of his own Condition, as thoroughly to turn from the Wickedness that he hath committed, and to live the remainder of his Days in the Practice of Virtue and good Works ; *doing that which is lawful and right,* and notwithstanding all his Failures, yet at last continues and perseveres there

that even such a Person as this *shall save his soul alive*, Ezek. xviii. 27. Altho' at the same time stands with a great deal of Reason, that the greater a Man's Sins have been, and the oftner he has relaps'd into them, the deeper his Sorrow, and the more laborious his Repentance must be, in order to obtain his Pardon. But since a Possibility of Pardon there is, even in this Case itself, we must not make the contrary Fear a Pre-
 fence for keeping our selves back from any of the Ordinances of God, and from a more immediate and intimate Communion with him.

And thus much for the first Impediment.

But, *Secondly*, some Men pretend, That they are so continually engaged, and taken up with Business, that they have not time to prepare themselves for the Holy Communion, and therefore do not come to it.

To such Men as these I answer, That this Business which they pretend, is either lawful Business or unlawful; if it be unlawful Business, and such as cannot be followed with a good conscience, it must be renounced and wholly laid aside; and to plead this as a Reason for not coming to the Holy Communion, is altogether to aggravate, instead of to excuse, our Neglect: but if the Business be itself lawful, and followed in a lawful way; if it neither contains, nor engages us in, any thing which is dishonest, or any way contrary to the Law of God; such Business as this is so far from unqualifying a Man, that really it rather renders him the more fit to receive the Holy Communion. For as Idleness is itself a Sin, and the Mother, or at least the Nurse, of all manner of Wickedness, so honest and lawful Business is a Duty which every Man is obliged to be diligent in, *1 Thess. iv. 11. Eph. iv. 28.*

iv. 28. And certainly the Performance of a Man's Duty will never render him the less acceptable to God, or unfit to draw near unto him in this or any other of his Ordinances.

But there is one particular sort of Business, in which some Men think that whilst they are engag'd, they cannot be well prepar'd for the Holy Communion, and that is a Law-Suit. But to this the very same Answer must be given, that is already returned to the Pretence of Business in general. If a Man engages in a Suit of Law with a Design to wrong or defraud another; if in the Management of it he has recourse to any base and wicked Arts or Contrivances; if, not contented fairly to try the Merits of the Cause, he strives by all the ways to cast personal Reflections upon his Adversary; or, in a word, if herein he proceeds in such a way as is contrary either to Justice or Charity; such a Law-Suit as this, I confess, renders a Man altogether unfit to approach unto God in any way whatsoever; not only whilst he is engaged in it, but also until he has made Restitution and Satisfaction to the best of his Power, for all the Wrong that he has thereby done unto his Neighbour. But then why will any Man, who pretends to Christianity, engage in such a Matter as this, which is contrary to common Honesty, and a good Conscience? Or if unadvisedly he has engaged himself, before he knew what he did; why does he not withdraw, and forbear to prosecute an unjust Cause, or a just one in an unjust way? Why does not he make Satisfaction to his Neighbour, if he has done him any Wrong; And how can he think to plead that as an Excuse for not coming to God's Holy Table, which it is in his Power to lay aside, and to remedy whenever he pleases?

But

But on the other side, if he designs no more but fairly to make use of the Law of the Land, and the Power of the Magistrate, (who is ordained of God) either to defend or recover what in Conscience he is verily persuaded is his just and lawful Right; if in the Management of his Business he proceeds honestly, and without any Fraud or Juggle; and lastly, if he bears no Malice, nor offers any way to vent his Spleen against the Person of his Adversary, but is always free and ready to do him any reasonable Office of Kindness or Friendship; in such a Law-Suit as this, there is nothing which is contrary to the Duty of a Christian, nor consequently anything which needs be in the least a Hindrance to his coming to the Holy Communion.

But some perhaps will say, That altho' there is nothing sinful or unlawful either in the Business they are about, or in their way of managing or following it; yet their Time is so wholly taken up thereby, that they have not Leisure for the Performance of those solemn and particular Devotions, which are necessary in order to their due Preparation. Nay such may be the Condition of some, that have not, it may be, so much as a Place of Retirement for their private Devotions, (which may be the Case of many Servants and private Soldiers, and such like) and how can they prepare themselves as they ought, or how shall they venture to come, if they are not so prepared?

To this I answer, That it is a Mistake which some well-meaning Men have entertain'd, that they think they must not venture to receive the Holy Communion, except they say so many Prayers, and spend so many Hours in Retirement and Meditation, for some Days immediately before,

fore the Celebration of it. Where a Man indeed is at his own Command, and Master of his own Time, he is much to be approved of, and commended, if upon such an Occasion as this he spends more Hours than at other times, in private Prayers, Reading, and Meditation, that he may trim his Lamp before he goes to meet the Bridegroom, and cleanse and adorn his Wedding-Garment, before he comes to the Marriage-Feast. But where the publick Service of a Man's Country, or the private Necessities of himself or his Family, do engage him in so much Business, that he has not such Leisure for Retirement; in the midst of his Affairs he ever takes Care to have God in his Thoughts, and often to lift up his Heart to him by private Ejaculations, and when he has neither Chamber nor Closet, Garden nor Field to withdraw himself into, if he but seriously retires into his own Thoughts (which a Man may do in any Place, upon his Bed at Midnight, and even in the midst of the greatest Croud in the Day time) and there inquires into his past Sins, and renews his Resolutions of Amendment; and if all this proceeds from an *honest and well-meaning Heart*, truly and affectionately disposed to the Service of God and the Practice of Piety; no doubt but it shall be as well accepted by God, as the more solemn Devotions of those, who have better Opportunity of such Performances.

And thus much for the second Impediment.

Thirdly, Some pretend, That when they do endeavour to prepare themselves for the Holy Communion, they find they cannot do it as is ought to be done, and therefore they do not come. To the several Scruples of which sort of Men I shall return brief and distinct Answers.

Some

Some then do apprehend, that they are not fit to come, because they are ignorant, and not well grounded and instructed in the Principles of Religion.

To this I answer, That indeed, if a Man be ignorant of those things which are ordinarily necessary to the Salvation of every Christian; it is evidently not fit that he should come to the Holy Communion, until such time as he be better instructed. But such Instruction as this, is so easy to be had (at least among us) that it must be every Man's own Fault if he wants it: For how easy is it for every Man, who either reads the Scripture, or hears it read and expounded in our Congregations, sufficiently to learn all the great and necessary things of the Christian Religion? As for Example, That God created all things; that *Jesus Christ* is the Son of God; that he came into the World, and took our Nature upon him, to suffer for our Redemption; that, after he had suffered, he rose again from the Dead, and ascended into Heaven, where he remains for ever in the Glory and Majesty of God, making eternal Intercession for us; and that he shall come again at the End of the World to judge both the Living and the Dead, (who shall at that time be raised again) and to sentence every Man either to everlasting Happiness or eternal Misery: That every Christian is to be admitted into the Church by Baptism; that it is his Duty to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present World; and that it is by the Assistance of the Holy Ghost, who is the Giver of spiritual Life unto us, that we are alone enabled to perform these Duties; and lastly, that, in remembrance of the Death and Passion of our Saviour *Jesus Christ*, we are commanded to eat of that Bread, and drink of that

that Cup, which he has appointed, and which is the Communion of his Body and Blood, that is to say, the Means whereby we do communicate in the Benefits of the Sacrifice which he offered, and in the Merits of his Passion, which he underwent in his *Body*, and by the shedding of his *Blood* for our sakes, as I have already said. All this, I say, is so easy to be learnt and understood, that it is a great shame for any one who lives in a Christian Country, to be ignorant of any part of it. And he who is thus far instructed in his Religion; and endeavours according to his Ability, to encrease his Knowledge of divine Things, and hereunto adds the honest and sincere Practice of what he understands, needs never fear that God will reject him for want of more Knowledge. For altho' we must, according to our Capacity, add to our *Virtue, Knowledge*; yet it is not abundance of Knowledge, but much Honesty, Charity, and true Piety, that renders us acceptable and pleasing to God; see 1 Cor. i. 19. to the seventh Verse of the second Chapter.

Again, Some do find their Faith to be weak and wavering; and perplex'd with Doubts and Scruples, in Matters of Religion; and therefore are afraid to come.

To this I answer, That indeed the stronger and firmer a Man's Faith is, so much the better; and we ought to endeavour, as much as in us lies, that our Faith may ever be built upon sure and solid Principles, as well for our own Comfort and Satisfaction, as that we may be the better able, upon occasion, to give an Answer to every one who shall ask us the reason of the Hope that is in us, 1 Pet. iii. 15. But when a Man has done what he can to strengthen and confirm his Faith, if it still continues infirm and weak, yet if he

be honest and pious in his Life and Practice, he is never the less acceptable to God for the weakness of his Faith: For strength of Faith is not in our Power, and therefore not so much a Duty in us, as a Reward which God is pleased to bestow, in such a Measure as he thinks fit, upon those who are sincere and diligent in his Service; and *he that is weak in the Faith*, may yet be a very good Christian, and fit to be received into the Church of *Christ*, altho' he be not qualified for *doubtful Disputations*, Rom. xiv. 1. As long as a Tree continues to bring forth plenty of Fruit, we are sure it is alive, nor do we presently cut it down and cast it into the Fire, because it is not altogether so well fixed at the Root, and therefore it may be subject to be shaken by the Violence of the Wind: And the weakest Faith, if it produces abundance of good Works, shall be accepted by God; when the strongest Faith, if barren and unfruitful, shall be rejected and set at nought by him, see *Jam. ii. 14, &c.* Whenever therefore an honest and well-disposed Man finds his Faith to be any way weak and wavering, let him take up the good Man's Speech in the Gospel, *Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief*, Mark ix. 24. And let him never fear, but that God who is infinitely gracious and merciful, will accept of him.

Some again are afraid that they do not love God as well as they ought; and the reason of this Fear is, because they do not find in themselves such warm and affectionate Motions of their Minds towards him, as they apprehend to be suitable to his infinite Excellency and Goodness: And for this reason they dare not venture to come.

To this I answer, That indeed, the more ardent and affectionate our Love to God is, so much the better is that, as well as our Faith for being strong and unshaken ; but as our Faith is to be judged of by its Fruitfulness rather than its Firmness, (as I have just now shewn) so the Holy Scripture teaches us, That the *Love of God* consists altogether in *keeping his Commandments*, 1 Joh. v. 3. Some People are naturally of such a Temper, as more easily to be moved with a passionate Affection towards those they love, than others are ; and yet others, who do not find such warm Motions within themselves, may be as ready and willing as they, to do Acts of Kindness where they profess a Friendship : Nor is the Love of the latter Sort ever the less to be valued, because it appears to be seated and fixed more in the Judgment and Will, which are subject to less Alteration than the Affections ; as the true Love of a Wife to her Husband, is to be measured by her Readiness to obey and please him in all things, much rather than by the Fondness which she expresses to his Person. If therefore a Man finds himself stedfastly resolved *with full Purpose of Heart to cleave unto God*, and upon all Occasions to do what he commands, ever preferring the pleasing of him before any, or all the Honours, Profits or Pleasures of this World ; he may assure himself, that he is a real and true Lover of God ; nor need he absent himself from the Holy Communion, for want of that Ardency and Liveliness of Affection to God, which the very best of Men perhaps do esteem wish for, than enjoy, or find within themselves.

Others there are, who fear they are not in perfect Charity with all the World : They have sometimes

Sometimes had to do with Men of base and unjust Dealings, who have broken their Promises, and it may be, their Oaths, and thereby betray'd them who have depended on them; or have otherwise been guilty of wicked and unworthy Practices. And altho' in Obedience to God's Commands, they would not do any thing by way of Revenge, even against these very Men, yet as often as they see them, or do but think of them, they find their very Blood to rise against them, and cannot possibly suppress that Anger and Indignation which springs up in their Minds against such Persons, and therefore they fear that their Charity is defective, and so dare not come to the Holy Communion.

To this I answer, That our Charity towards Man, as well as our Love to God, is to be measur'd by the Purposes and Resolutions of our Will, and our Actions consequent there-
 to, and not by the sudden Motions of our Passions and Affections, which in the Case above-
 mention'd, may be scarcely so much in our Power, as wholly to be conquered and stifled by
 them. But whatever passionate Resentments may
 force themselves into our Minds upon such
 occasions as these; if we do not suffer them to
 break out into bitter and reproachful Expressions,
 or malicious and revengeful Actions: And if
 in spite of our Anger we do firmly resolve, in
 obedience to God's Commands, to return Good,
 and not Evil for Evil: In a word, if, as *St. Paul*
 directs us, when we are *Angry*, we take Care
 and watch over our selves that we *sin not*, Eph. iv.
 26. (which is certainly in our Power, through
 the Grace of God, and our own Endeavours)
 we need not fear that any such inward Motions
 of our Passions, as we cannot wholly suppress,

but yet do not suffer to break out into any sinful Words or Actions, shall ever be imputed to us as a Breach of Charity.

Others again are afraid that they are not sorrowful enough for the Sins which they have committed, because they do not find their Grief so quick and pungent as they think it ought to be; nor strong enough even so much as to bring a Tear from their Eyes, and therefore they dare not venture to come.

To this I answer, That true it is indeed, that we can never grieve too much for our Sins, whereby we have offended our good and gracious God; and if even *Rivers of Tears* could run down our Eyes, on this Occasion, they would all be but little enough. But yet, after all; our Sorrow for Sin is not to be measured by the Passionateness of it, which is soon over; or the Tears it produces, which are as soon dried up; but is altogether to be estimated by the Amendment which it causes in our Lives. It is a never-failing Rule which *St. Paul* gives us to know *Godly Sorrow* by, which is, that it *worketh Repentance*, 1 Cor. vii. 10. If then a Man has so true and serious a Sense of his Sins, as that it brings him to Repentance, that is to say, to a thorough and lasting Reformation of his Life; this Sorrow, tho' it never affects him in a passionate Way, or draws any Tears at all from his Eyes, yet it is certainly true godly Sorrow, and such as shall be accepted by God, because it *worketh Repentance*, which is the only End for which godly Sorrow is either required or valued.

Others yet again there are who complain, that when they would set themselves to prepare for the Holy Communion, they in a little time grow so tired with the length of those Devoti-

es which are thereunto required, that they are
 not able to accomplish what they propos'd. And
 when they would even *force* themselves to con-
 tinue their Prayers and Meditations, they can-
 not, with all their Care, keep their Minds fixed
 and attentive upon what they are about ; but
 their Thoughts will unavoidably wander upon
 other things that are idle and impertinent. And
 thus they apprehend to be the Sin of *drawing*
near to God with their Mouths, and honouring him
with their Lips, when their Heart is far from
him, Isai. xxix. 13. And therefore, they dare not
 come unto his Holy Table.

To this I answer, That whenever we address
 our selves unto God in Prayer, we ought cer-
 tainly to use our utmost Endeavours so to fix
 and compose our Minds, as that our Thoughts,
 may not wander and go astray, if we can possi-
 bly hinder them.

And he who pretends to pray with his Lips,
 and does not withal strive that his Heart and
 Mind may be devoutly affected, is undoubtedly
 guilty of a great Slight put upon the Majesty of
 God ; and may justly be taxed with some Part
 of that Sin which I but just now made mention
 of. But when a Man has done the best he can
 to fix his Thoughts, and to keep his Mind from
 wandering in Prayer ; If after all this, idle and
 impertinent Imaginations do, against his Will,
 crowd themselves upon him ; and like Flies, tho'
 continually beaten off, yet still return again and
 molest him : In this Case he may well assure
 himself that God, who is gracious and merciful,
 will never impute that to him as a Sin, which
 with all his Endeavours, he cannot help : But
 shall only be reckoned upon the Score of his
 infirmities, against which indeed he must ever
 strive

strive; but it may be shall never be able wholly to conquer them as long as he lives.

But there is one piece of Advice which I think very proper to offer unto those that are in these Circumstances; which is, that they should compress their private Devotions in as few Words as conveniently they can; and then they will neither be so apt to be tired, nor their Thoughts to wander therein, as when they are drawn out to a greater length. It is not *much Speaking* that makes our Prayers the more acceptable to God, or the sooner heard by him, *Matt. vi. 7*. And it is easy to comprehend all that is extraordinarily necessary to be said in Prayer, in a few Words. The Lord's Prayer is but short; and yet very full; and certainly a Form most acceptable to God. The Publican's *God be merciful to me a Sinner*, *Luk. xviii. 13*. was as well received, coming from a sincere and honest Heart, as if he had made his Confession in more Words. And there is no manner of doubt, but that short and devout Ejaculations, frequently offered up to God, by a truly pious Soul, shall effectually prevail at the Throne of Grace, when they come from such a Person, as by reason of his natural Frailty and Infirmary, is not so well able to make longer Prayers.

Again, Some there are who are given to Mirth and Company-keeping; and know not how well to become serious, and reserved enough to be fit for the Holy Communion, and therefore they do not come.

I answer, That a chearful and pleasant Disposition is so far from being unlawful, or any way displeasing to God; that, on the contrary, where it is rightly managed, and kept within due Bounds, it is commonly very serviceable to the

the promoting of Peace and Love in the World, which is one of the great Ends of Christian Religion. Let then a Man but take *strict* Care, that his Mirth be not sinful in it self, nor instrumental to promote Wickedness in the World: Let him not droll upon Religion and Piety, nor *make a Mock at Sin*: Let no Jest that is bitter or sarcastical, or tends to the Discredit or Undermining of his Neighbour, or which is any way profane, filthy, or obscene, come forth of his Lips; nor let him shew any manner of Delight or Satisfaction when such things are vented by others: Let him abstain from all debauched Songs and Stories, which seem to be contrived on purpose to corrupt the World: And let him never promote, but always, as much as he can, discountenance all manner of Rioting, Drunkenness, Lewdness and Profaneness: In a word, let him be sure, that his Mirth betrays neither himself, nor others, to any thing which is contrary to Piety, Charity, or Sobriety; and as long as he keeps himself within such Bounds as these, which is plainly very possible to every Man who will heartily resolve it) he needs not fear that a careless and facetious Behaviour, will render him ever the worse a Christian, or the less fit to receive the Holy Communion.

And last of all, (that I may conclude what I have to say under this Head) Some there are, who having met with many Crosses and Afflictions in the World, have their Minds so discomposed, and their Thoughts distracted with Care, Grief or Trouble, that they cannot settle their Minds, as they think they ought for the holy Communion; and therefore they do not come to it.

To

To this I answer, That if any Trouble or Affliction provokes a Man to Impatience, and prevails so far as to make him murmur and repine against the Providence of God; this, indeed, is a Sin, and must and may, as all other Sins, be repented of, as I have already said under the first Head of this Discourse. But if there be no more in it than this, that the Crosses and Vexations under which a Man lies, do so discompose his Mind, as that he cannot keep his Thoughts from wandering when he is at his Devotion: To this Case I have but just now spoken, and need not repeat what I have said upon it.

And thus I have at last done with the third Impediment, upon which I have been forc'd the longer to dwell, because of the many Scruples and Objections which it affords.

I shall need to speak but a Word or two to the *Fourth* Impediment, which some Men pretend; namely, That having formerly received the Holy Communion, they find themselves never the better for it, and therefore think it to no Purpose to come again.

To which I answer, That if a Man reaps no Benefit by the Reception of the holy Communion, the Fault is altogether his own, because either he does not duly prepare himself for it, or else does not receive it so often as he should. Some Bodies are so distemper'd, and Stomachs vitiated, that they turn the best Food into corrupt and evil Nourishment: And if a Man of the most healthy Constitution should eat but one Meal in a Week, it would never keep him in Health and Strength, but let the Stomach be cleansed, and the Body brought into good Order, and then let the Man eat his constant and daily Meals, and he shall find both his Health

and Strength increase upon him. And the Case is just the same with this spiritual Food, which is exhibited to us in the Holy Sacrament: Whilst the Soul is polluted and distemper'd with Sins unrepented of, it will certainly rather do us Hurt than Good to receive it; and when Men partake of it but once in a Year or two, or it may be not so often, whatever Strength or Refreshment their Souls begin to find thereby, is lost and forgot before it comes again to be renewed by the same Ordinance. But let a Man thoroughly cleanse and purge his Soul from Sin by a sincere Repentance; and with an honest Heart, and Mind well prepared, let him come as often as he can to God's Holy Table; and by the frequent and constant Use of this Holy Sacrament, he need not doubt but he shall find himself continually to grow more and more in Grace, becoming still better, and better enabled to resist all Temptations, and daily find more and more Quiet and Comfort in his Mind and Conscience.

And thus much for the Fourth Impediment.

I come now in the *last Place* of all, to speak a Word or two to those who are not well satisfied with the manner of celebrating the Holy Communion in our Church, and therefore will not join with our Congregations in it.

Two things there are which are chiefly objected against us in this Case; One, That we make use of such Ceremonies as they cannot comply with; and in particular, that the Holy Communion is amongst us to be received in the Posture of kneeling. And the other is, That we administer it to a mixt Congregation, without strict Enquiry into the Qualifications of all those who are admitted to it.

To the First of these I answer, That no Man can say, that either kneeling at the Holy Communion, or any other of the Rites or Ceremonies which we use at the Celebration of it, are sinful and unlawful; because it does not appear that God has any where *forbid* them. The utmost then that they can pretend, is only that they are improper and inconvenient. Now besides that others, who may be as good Judges, are of a different Opinion; I would desire to know whether such things as are not sinful, but only improper and inconvenient, can be a sufficient Warrant to any Man to separate himself from the Communion of an Orthodox, Established Church? If not, then they have no just reason upon this account to separate from us. But if they be, then I would farther demand, which is the greatest Inconveniency, to kneel at the Communion, or to make a Schism in the Church? And of the two Inconveniencies, whether we ought not always to make Choice of the least?

To the other Objection I answer, That where any Man openly appears to be wicked and scandalous in his Life and Conversation, by the Discipline of our Church, we are required to exclude such a Person from the Holy Communion, until he gives good Evidence of his Repentance and Reformation; but where nothing outwardly appears against a Man who lives in the Profession of the true Religion; what have we to do to enquire into the Secrets of his Heart, for which he is accountable only to God? And if our Saviour *Christ* did not exclude even *Judas* himself from the Holy Communion, because at that time he had done nothing openly; altho' *Christ* well knew that he had made a private Agreement with the Chief Priests to betray him, why should we
take

take upon us to be more strict in this Matter?
Or who has given us any Authority so to be?

And thus have I examined, and I hope sufficiently answered, all the Pretences which Men do ordinarily make for neglecting the Holy Communion. I have but this one thing to add, and I have done; namely, that as it is a great Sin to receive the Holy Communion unworthily, that is to say, without true Repentance; so certainly it is no less a Sin, to slight and neglect that Ordinance which *Christ* himself has expressly appointed and commanded, in Remembrance of that Death and Passion which he underwent for us. Let us therefore take the Matter into our serious Consideration; and whilst we are so very cautious to avoid the Danger on the one Hand, let us not be so foolish, as to run our selves into as great a Hazard on the other: For as he who presumed to come to the Nuptial-Feast, without a *Wedding-Garment*, was severely punished for his Presumption, *Matt. xxii. 13.* so they who neglected to come at all, and slighted the Invitation which was given them, were accounted as unworthy Persons, and received their Doom accordingly, *ψ. 7, 8.*

A brief Account of the End and Design of the Holy Communion, the Obligation to receive It; the Way to prepare for It, and the Behaviour of our selves both at, and after It.

IN a former Discourse, entituled, *An Answer to all the Excuses and Pretences, which Men ordinarily make for their not coming to the Holy Communion*; I have endeavoured to remove all those

Obstacles, whether real or pretended, which to many Men seem, either wholly to stop their Way to God's Holy Table, or at least to render it very difficult and troublesome to be passed. If what I have therein said has had any Influence upon the Minds of well-meaning Men, so as to *incline* them, something more than formerly, to prepare themselves for the partaking of this sacred Ordinance; I hope that what I am now about to offer, may both make them thoroughly sensible of the Obligation which lies upon them thereto, and also sufficiently instruct them in every thing which is necessary, in the Performance thereof, to render them worthy Receivers, and acceptable to Almighty God.

Five Things there are which are very necessary to be understood by every one who would be thoroughly instructed and directed in order to the receiving of the Holy Communion; namely, *First*, For what End and Purpose this Ordinance was instituted and appointed. *Secondly*, What Obligation lies upon every Christian to come and receive it. *Thirdly*, How often we all of us ought to partake of it. *Fourthly*, What Preparation is necessary in order to it? And *lastly*, How we ought to behave our selves both at, and after it. And altho' I have hinted many things in my former Discourse above mentioned, which might in some sort serve for an Answer to these Enquiries; yet because what there is spoken, which may relate to these Particulars, is only occasionally touched, and but just glanced at; I have thought it may not be improper a little more fully, and methodically, to handle them.

For the clearing of the first Point proposed, we must call to mind what the Holy Scripture so often declares to us; that our Blessed Saviour

Jesus

Jesus Christ died for us; that we are justified by his Blood, and saved from Wrath thro' him. And altho' we were once Enemies, are yet upon our true Repentance reconciled to God by the Death of his Son, Rom. v. 8, 9, 10. and thereby put into a Capacity of being made eternally happy in the Life to come. From whence it will follow that as, in the first Place, it is the Duty of every Christian, always to be thankful for, and never to forget, or be unmindful of, so great a Favour and Benefit, vouchsafed and offered to us; so secondly, except a Man have an Interest in the Death and Passion of Christ, and is made a Partaker of the Merits of his Sufferings; and of that Propitiation which he thereby made for the Sins of the World, 1 Job. ii. 2. he can have no just Ground to hope for everlasting Salvation. That therefore both these Ends might the more effectually be obtained; and that all Christians might often, in a lively manner, be put in mind, and also, at the same time, be made Partakers of the Merits of Christ's Death and Sufferings, this sacred Ordinance was appointed by him, both as the Commemoration of his Passion, and also the Communion of his Body and Blood. Thus the Apostle St. Paul tells us, what three of the Evangelists have also recorded, that The Lord Jesus, the same Night in which he was betrayed, took Bread, and when he had given Thanks, he brake it, saying, Take, Eat, this is my Body which is broken for you; This do in Remembrance of me. After the same manner he took the Cup, when he had supped, saying; This Cup is the New Testament in my Blood; this do ye, as oft as ye drink it in Remembrance of me. For (says the Apostle in the same Place) as often as ye eat this Bread, and drink this Cup, ye do shew the Lord's Death.

Death till he come, 1 Cor. xi. 23, &c. And the same St. Paul tells us, in the sixteenth Verse of the foregoing Chapter, that the *Cup of Blessing which we bless, is the Communion of the Blood of Christ; and the Bread which we break, the Communion of the Body of Christ.* From which Passages of Scripture it is obvious to collect, why this divine Institution is ordinarily called sometimes the *Lord's Supper*, and sometimes the *Holy Communion*.

Here then we have a full and plain Answer to the First Thing proposed to be handled, namely, *For what End and Purpose this Ordinance was instituted and appointed.* It was appointed (as we may see) *First*, To put us in Remembrance of the Death and Sufferings of our Saviour *Jesus Christ*: The breaking of the Bread being put to represent the Crucifixion of his Body; and the Wine his Blood, which was shed for us. And *Secondly*, That it might be to us, not only the Commemoration, but also the *Communion* of the Body and Blood of *Christ*, that is to say, the Means which God has ordained, by the use of which we do communicate in the Benefits of that Sacrifice which *Christ* offered, and in the Merits of that Death and Passion which he underwent in his *Body*, and by the shedding of his Blood for us; as I have already said in my former Discourse.

I come now to the *Second* Thing proposed to be enquired into, namely, What Obligation lies upon every Christian to come and receive the Holy Communion.

And here, in the First Place, What Obligation can be stronger than the plain and positive Command of our Saviour *Christ* himself? which he has laid upon us in as express Terms as can be;
that

that we should *do this*, that is to say, *Eat of this Bread, and drink of this Cup in remembrance of him*; as we may find in the Words just now quoted, 1 Cor. xi. 23, &c. And that these Words were ever understood to contain in them a strict Command, perpetually binding all Christians to the Observation of it, most evidently appears as well from the Context of that Chapter, (from the twentieth Verse to the end) as from the constant great Care and Concern which the Apostolick and Primitive Church always shewed, in the maintaining, and decent Celebration of this Ordinance.

But besides the bare Authority of our Saviour *Christ*, which alone is sufficient to lay and indispensable Obligation upon us, there are some collateral Circumstances and Considerations which do add an extraordinary Weight and Force to this Command; as namely, that it was given at that very Time when he, who was our best Friend and greatest Benefactor, was just ready to die, and lay down his Life for our Sakes; and not only so, but this Command was given us to be observed in Remembrance of him, and of that Death which he underwent for us.

If a dying Friend should, before his Departure out of the World, make any Request to me, which were not impossible or unreasonable in itself; I should think my self much wanting in that Friendship which I had professed to him, if I should omit or neglect to perform it. But if this Friend had been one, not of the common sort, but a very great and extraordinary Benefactor to me; and if, beyond this, he were just going to lay down his Life for my Sake; and Lastly, if his Request were, that I would do something which might be a Means to keep me

always in *Remembrance* of him, and of what he had done for me: Certainly I might well be accounted as one of the most barbarous and ungrateful Wretches that ever liv'd, if I were not very careful most punctually to observe, and fulfil, whatever should thus be enjoined and laid upon me. Now beside the Authority which our Saviour *Christ* has to lay an Obligation upon us; we all of us sure must acknowledge that he is our Friend, our greatest Friend, and chiefest Benefactor; and that it was for our Sakes alone that he underwent all his Sufferings, and yielded up his Life upon the Cross. And since he has made this Request, and left it as a Command unto all who should believe in him, that they should eat of this Bread, and drink of this Cup, in remembrance of him, and of what he had suffered for us; I would fain know how any Man, who calls himself a Christian, can possibly be excused from the greatest Ingratitude, as well as Disobedience, if he neglects to do what he thus appears to be so strongly and doubly obliged to? And with what Confidence can he hope to be saved by the Merits and Passion of *Christ*, whilst he refuses, or neglects to commemorate his Death and Sufferings, in that manner which *Christ* himself has appointed?

And thus I think we have a sufficient Answer to the second Thing proposed; namely, What Obligation lies upon every Christian to receive the Holy Communion. We are plainly obliged to do it, First, in Point of *Duty*; because we are thereunto expressly commanded by *Christ Jesus* our Saviour: And Secondly, in Point of *Gratitude*; because this Injunction was laid upon us by our best Friend, and greatest Benefactor, when he was just ready to lay down his
Life

Life for us, that it might serve as a Means to keep up in his Church a *lively Remembrance* of him, and of his great Love to us for ever.

I proceed then to the *Third* Thing proposed to be handled; namely, How often we all of us ought to partake of the Holy Communion. The Answer to which Question is briefly and plainly this, *viz.* That every sincere Christian is obliged to *partake of the Holy Communion as often as he has Opportunity for it.* The Truth of which Assertion, I think, will appear beyond all manner of Exception, from these Two following Considerations.

First, I suppose, it will easily be granted, that whosoever is an honest and *sincere Christian*, ought not to let slip any Opportunity that is fairly offered him of expressing his Thankfulness to Almighty God for that infinite Mercy vouchsafed unto Mankind, in our Redemption by the Death and Passion of our blessed Lord and Saviour: For he that is wanting in his Thankfulness to God for so inestimable a Benefit, thereby plainly demonstrates that he is not thoroughly sincere in his Christianity, which indispensably obliges him to his Duty. Now that the devout Participation of the Holy Communion is one very fit and proper way of expressing our Thanks and Acknowledgments to God for our Redemption, by the Sufferings and Death of *Christ*, (for the thankful Commemoration whereof the very Ordinance was appointed) is so very plain, that no Man I think who owns the Authority of the holy Scriptures, and is not misled by false and enthusiastick Notions, can deny, or so much as doubt of. From whence it must needs follow, that he who has a fair Opportunity of Receiving the Holy Communion, and yet neglects to partake.

take of it, is deficient in the Expression of his Thankfulness to God; and consequently is not sufficiently sincere in that Christianity which he professes.

Secondly, Whosoever has an Opportunity offered him of doing a good Act, and has no just Reason or Excuse for his not doing of it, is certainly bound and obliged to do it, according to the Opportunity which is so offered. Now that to participate of the Holy Communion is a good Act, I have already shewn, in that I have proved it to be our Duty; and that there can be no such Thing as a just Excuse or Reason for not partaking of it, I have proved at large in my former Discourse; in which I have fully answered all manner of Pretences of this Nature. The Consequence then must be, that whosoever has an Opportunity of receiving the Holy Communion, and yet neglects to receive it, is most evidently guilty of a Failure in his Christian Duty.

But here perhaps I shall be told, That sometimes, 'tis possible, an Opportunity for receiving the Holy Communion may offer it self, when a Man is not duly prepared for it, and therefore ought not to partake of it. To which I answer, That he who is a sincere Christian, ought never to be unprepared for this holy Ordinance, which will evidently appear from what I have to say upon,

The *Fourth* Thing proposed to be handled; namely, What Preparation is necessary, in order to the receiving of the Holy Communion?

Now to this holy Ordinance, (and indeed to all solemn Acts of Devotion) a twofold Preparation is necessary; *First*, a general, and *Secondly*, a particular One. I call that a *general Preparation*, which *always* ought to be making, and is not the Work of a few Hours only, but should be

be the main Business of every Man's whole Life. And that I call a *particular Preparation*, which is then more especially to be made, whenever we are upon thus approaching to God, and have a particular Design of coming to his Holy Table.

The general Preparation then which is necessary for every Man that would come with Acceptance to the Holy Communion, is Repentance for his past Sins, together with a virtuous and holy Life, in all Points agreeable unto the Laws of God, (I mean to the best of his Power) and never wilfully or habitually straying away from those Rules and Precepts which are prescribed to us in the Gospel. For he, who having not repented of his Sins, but living still in the wilful Practice of any of them, or the *known* Neglect of any Duty, shall offer to approach unto God in any Act of Devotion whatsoever, is so far from doing a thing which is acceptable to him, that, on the contrary, God has express'd the greatest Abhorrence that well can be, unto all such Worship or Service as this, *The Sacrifice of the Wicked is an Abomination unto the Lord*, Prov. xv. 8. And again, *He that turneth away his Ear from hearing the Law, even his Prayer shall be an Abomination*, Ch. xxviii. 9. besides a Multitude of other Texts that might be quoted to the same Purpose. And here we must ever remember what the Apostle St. James tells us, Chap, ii. 10. And what in it self also is most highly rational, namely, that *whosoever shall keep the whole Law, and yet [wilfully] offend in any one Point, (and continue therein without Repentance) is guilty of all*: For (according to the Apostle's Reasoning in the next Verse) since the same God, who forbids one Sin, has also forbid all others; he who wilfully persists in any one Sin, whatever it be, plainly despises

spies the very Authority of God, and thereby, as much as in him lies, undermines the very Foundation of his whole Law.

I will not then stand to dispute how those Words of St. Paul are to be interpreted, that *He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh Damnation to himself*, 1 Cor. xi. 29. But this I take to be as plain both from Reason and Scripture as such a thing can be; That not only he who comes to the Holy Communion, but who dares to offer up his Prayers to God, while he wilfully persists in any known Sin, or the Neglect of any known Duty, is guilty of a very great Affront to the divine Majesty. To come to the Marriage-Feast without a *Wedding Garment*, was resented as a high Contempt of the King who made the Invitation, *Matt. xxii. 12, 13*. And to *bow the Knee to Christ*, and cry *Hail King of the Jews*, at the same time when they *spit on him, and smote him on the Head*, was nothing but a redoubling of their *Mockery*, *Mat. xxvii. 29, 30*. And I appeal to the common Sense of every Man, whether he is not guilty of the very same sort of Practice towards Almighty God, who bends his Knees, or shews outward Signs of Reverence to him in Prayers, or at the Holy Communion, while his Heart and Affections are not truly bent to serve and obey him in all his Actions; but he, on the contrary, lives in an habitual Violation of his Laws, and a continued Contempt of his Power and Authority.

But besides this which I call a *general Preparation*, there is also a more *particular Preparation* which is very proper, and *ordinarily necessary* in order to the Reception of the Holy Communion, which the Apostle St. Paul tells us is *Self-Examination*: *Let a Man examine himself, and so let him*

him eat of that Bread, and drink of that Cup, says
 1 Cor. xi. 28. That is, in other Terms, that
 whenever a Man designs to present himself at
 God's Holy Table, he ought beforehand seri-
 ously to call himself to an Account, whether or
 no he be so qualified, as to be acceptable to God
 when he comes there; that is to say, whether
 or no he really and truly has that *general Prepa-*
ration, of which I have been just now speaking,
 and without which he ought not to come. For
 such an Enquiry as this be not often and care-
 fully made, the Filth and pollution of Sin will,
 by little and little, in a manner almost insensibly
 leave again to our Souls, till by Degrees it de-
 stroys and takes away that *general Preparation*
 which ought always to be kept and maintained
 by us. Whilst we sometimes *slumber or sleep*,
 our *Lamps* will be apt to burn dim, and therefore
 must be new *trimmed* at our going out to *meet*
 the *Bridegroom*, Mat. xxv. 5, 6, 7. And when we
 have put on the *Wedding-Garment*, Mat. xxii. 12.
 it is yet very fit, that as often as we come to the
 Marriage-Feast, we should examine and take a
 careful View of our Dress, for fear it should
 have contracted some Spot or Defilement.

But here perhaps it will be demanded, Is this all
 the Preparation that is necessary to the receiving
 of the Holy Communion; that a Man should lead
 a virtuous and christian Life, and not be con-
 scious to himself (upon the Examination of his
 Conscience) that he continues in any unrepent-
 ed Sin? Is it not absolutely necessary, that upon
 every such Occasion at this, he should run thro'
 the whole Catalogue of Sins, and examine him-
 self particularly upon every one of them, with
 all their Circumstances and Aggravations? And
 ought not he also, for some Days before-hand,

to

to sequester himself from all worldly Business whatsoever, and to spend his Time only in Prayer, Meditation, Reading, and such like Acts of Devotion?

That honest and lawful Business is never to be reckoned as a Hindrance from the Holy Communion, I have shewn in my former Discourse. And to the rest of what is here urged, I answer, That such a strict and particular Examination of our Conscience is undoubtedly sometimes the Duty of every Man: For except we thus *search and try our Ways*, that we may clearly discern wherein we have gone astray, we shall not be able to *turn again to the Lord*, as we ought to do, *Lam. iii. 40.* Nor do I think that any Time can be more proper and convenient for this, than when we are about to approach unto God's Table, that some suitable Prayers, and proper Meditations also, ought to be used upon such an Occasion as this, (as indeed upon every particular Occasion whatsoever, that is of any considerable Moment) every Man's own Reason must tell him, is a Part of his Christian Duty. But that every Time he receives the Holy Communion he should thus nicely examine himself, if there be not some other particular Reason for it; and that so much time extraordinary should always beforehand be spent in Prayer and Meditation, more than at other Seasons, is what I can find no Argument either from Reason or Scripture, to prove necessary. It is beyond Dispute, that the primitive Christians did every Lord's Day, (if not oftener) receive the Holy Communion; and if they had thought themselves oblig'd to spend so much Time always in particular Preparation, as some Men seem to think necessary, it would scarce have been possible for them to have had sufficient

Leisure from their Devotions, to have followed the Business of their Callings, to get a Livelihood for themselves and their Families: And those extraordinary long Exercises of Prayer, Reading and Meditation, which some do require, by way of Preparation to this Ordinance; as they do affright and keep away many from it, who find that they are not well able to go through with them; so is the Performance of them such a tiresome thing to others, that it often makes them heavy and unapt even for their ordinary Devotions for some time after they had received the Holy Communion. And therefore for the Reader's better Satisfaction and Direction, I have at the End of this Discourse set down a few short Rules how we ought always to prepare our selves for the receiving of it.

I come now to the *Last* thing proposed to be touch'd on; namely, how we ought to behave our selves both at and after the Holy Communion; in which the very Nature and Design of the Ordinance itself, will be a most plain and clear Direction to us. For since the Intent of it is not only a solemn and perpetual Commemoration of the Death of *Christ*, but also the Communion or Participation of the Merits of his Passion, (as I have already shewn) it will follow, *First*, That at this Office we ought to behave our selves with a suitable Seriousness, Attention and Reverence. And *Secondly*, That after it we ought to return most humble Thanks to Almighty God, for the great Benefits which he is pleased to vouchsafe unto us by it. For our more particular Direction wherein, I have to this Discourse subjoined some short Rules, Prayers and Meditations, which I take to be proper to the Occasion, and I hope may prove useful to those of an ordinary
Capa-

Capacity, for whom this small Work is chiefly designed; to which therefore I refer the Reader, without adding here any more upon this Point.

Brief Rules for Preparation for the Holy Communion, and Behaviour both at, and after it; with short Prayers and Meditations suitable to that Occasion.

Of general Preparation.

HE that would maintain and keep himself in a constant *general Preparation* for the Holy Communion; so as always to be fit, upon the shortest Notice to partake of it, (which certainly every Christian ought ever to endeavour after) must be careful in the Observation of these following Rules.

1. He must be diligent in his Endeavours to know and understand all the several Parts and Branches of his Duty to God, to all other Men, and to himself. For which End he must be careful to make the best Use he can of all those Means of Instruction and Knowledge which God has put into his Power, such as reading the Holy Scriptures, and other good Books, or hearing them read; attending upon the publick Offices of Preaching, Catechising, and the like, *Prov. iv. 5. John v. 39. 2 Tim. iii. 15. John xiii. 17.*

2. He must, upon all Occasions, be industrious and zealous in the avoiding of every Sin, and the Practice and Performance of every Duty, according to his Ability and Opportunity for the same *Tit. ii. 11, 12, 13, 14. Matt. vii. 21. Luke xii. 47.*

3. He must very often think and meditate upon his Ways, and all his particular Practices, and examine

examine whether or no they are agreeable to the Rules of his Duty: that wheresoever he finds he has been deficient, or done amiss, he may take the better Care to rectify and amend it for the time to come, *Psal. iv. 4. and cxix. 59. Lam. iii. 40.*

For which End and Purpose I recommend this following easy, but very profitable Task, which I would have every Man constantly to impose upon himself; namely, two or three times in the Course of each Day to carry his Thoughts back, and seriously to consider what he has that Day been doing, and how he has spent his Time from the very Minute that he first awaken'd from Sleep: As for Example, When first I awak'd, did I think upon God, and recommend my self to his Almighty Care and Protection? Or did not worldly, or it may be sinful Thoughts first take Possession of my Heart? Again, I was lately in such or such Company; how, and after what manner did I behave my self? Were all my Words and Actions innocent, modest and decent? Did I give no Offence to God, or Scandal to the World, by any thing which there I either said or did? &c. Such Questions as these, if we could constantly and seriously put home to our Consciences, while things remain *fresh in our Memories*, it is evident what a mighty Influence it would have upon us, to restrain us from Evil, and excite us to do that which is good.

Of particular Preparations.

I. Whenever Notice is given of the Celebration of the Holy Communion, let every sincere and devout Christian immediately resolve by no means to miss that Opportunity of commemorating the Sufferings, and communicating in the Merits of his Blessed Lord and Saviour.

D.

II. And

II. And in the midst of all his Business, (in the mean time) let him very often call to Mind, that such a Day he must not be absent from God's Holy Table, and therefore must be very careful not to do any thing which may render him unfit for it.

III. At some Seasons it is very necessary that every Man should set a little time apart for the more strict and particular Examination of his Conscience; for which End and Purpose I earnestly recommend that Catalogue of Sins which is drawn up at the End of that excellent Book, *The whole Duty of Man*, which I would have every Man very distinctly to go over; and upon every Particular to recollect his Actions, and ask his Conscience, *Have I been guilty of this?*

IV. But where a Man very often receives the Communion, and never misses any Opportunity for it; I do not conceive that such a particular Examination is every Time absolutely necessary; nor have all Men at all Times Leisure enough for it. But however, ordinarily, I think no Man ought to receive the Holy Communion without some previous Examination of himself. For the more easy and regular Performance of which, I would have it remembred, that the whole Duty of a Christian is reducible to these three Heads, *Mat. xxii. 37, &c.*

1. To love God in the highest Degree.
2. Sincerely, (and not corruptly or sensually) to love himself.
3. To love every Man with the same sort of Love, (tho' not in the same Degree) as he loves himself.

V. Every Time then, that a Man receives the Holy Communion, I would have him, beforehand, seriously to put, at least, these three Questions home to his Conscience.

1. Do I really and truly love God above all Things? And do I effectually shew this my Love by a due Honour and Respect to him in all my Thoughts, Words and Actions?
2. Have I a sincere and upright Love for my self? that is, Do I love my Soul better than my Body? And am I more heartily concerned to secure my everlasting Happiness in the World to come, than to compass my Pleasure or Profit in this Life?
3. Have I real and sincere Love for all Mankind without Exception? And do I effectually shew this my Love by hurting no Man by Word or Deed, (where I can possibly avoid it) and by being ready to do good to every Man whatsoever, in all Ways, and upon all Occasions, wherever I have Ability and Opportunity?

And if these three Questions are but *seriously* meditated upon *for a little Time*, there is scarce any Sin that a Man has been guilty of, but they will point it out to him.

VI. When a Man by the Examination of his Conscience, has set his Sins full in his View, then let him insert into his ordinary Devotions, this, or some such like Confession of them to God.

O Most gracious God! I thy unworthy Creature, here humbly acknowledge my Sins before thee. And besides those which I have now recollected, I cannot but own that I lie under the Guilt of many more Transgressions; altho' I am not able to recount or remember them. Nor can I deny, but that I have committed many Sins, even contrary to the Motions of thy Grace, and the Light and Conviction of my own Conscience; and therefore do most justly deserve the Severity of thy Wrath and Indignation

nation against me: But, Lord, I fly unto thee for Mercy; for the Sake of Christ Jesus our blessed Redeemer, be merciful to me in the Pardon of all my Sins, known and unknown; and so guide and assist me by thy good Grace, that for the time to come, I may be duly careful to abstain from every evil thing; may grow in Grace, and be zealous of good Works, and maintain a Conscience void of Offence towards God, and towards Men; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

To which let him add this short Prayer.

MOST merciful God, who hast given thine only Son Jesus Christ, to die for our Sins, grant me thy Grace, I humbly beseech thee, that I may never be unmindful, but always truly thankful for that inestimable Benefit vouchsafed unto me by his Death and Sufferings; and so fit and prepare me, O Lord, by the Assistance of thy Holy Spirit, that both at this, and all other Times, I may be rightly qualified to commemorate the Passion of my blessed Redeemer, in that holy Ordinance which he has appointed; and also thereby effectually to partake of that Redemption which he has wrought for all Mankind, thro' the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Of Behaviour at and after the Holy Communion.

1. At the Holy Communion, and at all other Times in the Worship of God, let every Man strive as much as he can, to keep his Mind intent and fix'd upon what he is about, and to lay aside not only all wicked Thoughts, but also all such as are impertinent to the present Business.

2. Let him also take Care to behave himself with that outward Decency and Composedness, as may be a sufficient Token of that inward Devotion and Reverence which he bears in his Heart,
without

without gazing about, or any way unnecessarily moving his Body, or whispering to any one that is near him, or the like.

3. While the Service is performing, let him all along join with the Minister and Congregation, with his Heart and Thoughts lifted up to God; and with his Tongue too, where the Liturgy requires that any thing should be spoken aloud by the People, as in the Responses, the Confession, the Lord's Prayer, and the Doxology.

4. But let him take Care likewise to avoid all manner of Affectation, and not to behave himself in such a manner, as if he had a mind to be taken notice of for a Person of extraordinary Devotion. For which Reason, whatever private Prayers or Meditations he may have to offer to God, let him put them up in his Thoughts alone, and let not his Voice be heard but when the publick Office requires it.

5. When he has received the Bread, let him offer up this or some such short Ejaculation to God.

O Good God! Grant that by the Sufferings of my dear Saviour, who was crucified for me, I may escape eternal Sufferings, and be made Partaker of everlasting Glory.

And when he has received the Cup, let him in his Heart thus say:

O Gracious God! Grant that by the shedding of the Blood of thy dear Son, I may obtain the Remission of all my Sins.

6. While the Bread and Wine are distributing to the rest of the Congregation, let him entertain himself with such sort of Meditations and Prayers as these.

1. Let him again bethink himself what those sins are to which he has been most enclined; and let

let him, in the Presence of God, seriously and stedfastly renew his Resolutions of being careful to abstain from them for the time to come.

2. Let him also consider what Opportunities he ordinarily has for the doing of any good Works, and let him stedfastly purpose, ever hereafter to be diligent in making use of them.

3. And let him hereunto add the following short Prayer.

*M*erciful God, assist me with thy Grace and Holy Spirit, that I may always keep those Vows, and good Resolutions which thou hast enabled me to make; that I may never return to any of my former Sins, but ever hereafter serve thee faithfully, in the constant Practice of Virtue and Religion, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

4. And here let him express his Charity by putting up a Prayer for all Mankind, in this or the like Form.

*L*ord, if it be thy gracious Will, extend thy Mercy and Compassion unto all Mankind. Enlighten the Minds of those that are ignorant; and move the Wills of those that are obstinate, that they may all receive thy holy Truth, and carefully live in the Practice of it. Pardon all my Enemies, O Lord, and bring them, and all of us all the World over, to true Repentance, that we may all live holily and righteously here, and may in the End be happy with thee hereafter, thro' Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

5. And then let him entertain himself with reading and meditating upon some select Portions of the Holy Scripture, until such time as the Minister is ready to proceed with the publick Office. I need not here transcribe any particular Texts but will leave every Man to make choice of such as are most agreeable to him, only, if he be a

a loss, let him read the Hundred and nineteenth Psalm, where he shall easily find proper Matter enough to employ his devoutest Thoughts upon this Occasion.

6. When the Service is ended, and the Congregation dismiss'd, let him depart to his Home or Place of Abode; and as soon as he has a convenient Opportunity of retiring into some private Place, let him first look back and consider whether or no, in the Performance of this holy Office, which he has so lately been at, he has behaved himself in all things as he ought to have done; and if he finds that he has been any way short or defective therein, let him resolve to take a better Care for the time to come.

7. And then let him conclude with this or the like Prayer.

Lord, I desire to return my most humble and hearty Thanks to thee for all thy Blessings both Spiritual and Temporal which thou hast vouchsafed to me. At this time particularly, I praise and bless thy Holy Name for that Opportunity which thou hast this Day given me of commemorating the Death and Passion of my blessed Redeemer, and also of partaking of his Merits, in the Participation of that Holy Ordinance which he has appointed. Lord, pardon all the Weaknesses and Defects which I have been guilty of in the Performance of that great Duty. And assist me with thy Grace, I beseech thee, that in the whole Course of my Life, I may ever be careful to fulfil and perform those Vows and Resolutions which I have made to thee, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

8. And last of all, Let him never as long as he lives, be forgetful of what he has thought, and said, and done, both before and at the Holy Communion. But let the Remembrance of

it be a constant Restraint upon him from all manner of Wickedness: And let him upon the Assault of any Temptation thus bethink himself.

At such a time I received the Holy Communion, and then I seriously resolved, and solemnly promised to Almighty God, that I would heartily endeavour in all Points to live like a Christian: Shall I then upon any Account cheat, lie, curse, swear, talk profanely or obscenely, or the like? No! God forbid. I have engaged my self to God to be another sort of a Man; and what can I expect but Wrath and Indignation from him, if knowingly and wilfully I should violate those Promises which I so deliberately and stedfastly made to him.*

THE END.
